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MANCHESTER, SALFORD AND DISTRICT

WOMEN'S WAR INTERESTS COMMITTEE

Women

in the

Labour Market

(Manchester & District)

during the War

PRICE ONE PENNY

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Perhaps the problem set up by women doing men's work for women's traditional wages is one of the greatest at the moment, but there are others of the gravest importance also. The attitude of the men's Trade Unions, the utter absence of organisation amongst many of the women and the failure of attempts to organise them and the unsatisfactory position of women in controlled establishments are discussed, as well as the necessity for canteens and the effect of long hours and nightwork on the health of the women.

The work of the Women's War Interests Committee in influencing public opinion by press campaigns, conferences and public meetings has been decidedly effective. The representations it has made to the Ministry of Munitions and the local advisory committees have been received with respect and have had considerable influence. The work of its Research Department has been of great value. These various activities are briefly set forth later on.

The industrial outlook is full of uncertainty for both men and women. The difficulty of adjustment after the war, the desire of many employers to retain women in new occupations, and the possible effect of this intention in the carrying out of Trades Union agreements, the danger of reducing the standard of living by the creation of masses of unorganised labour, and the danger to child life by the withdrawal of women from the home without proper supervision for children's welfare are all tentatively discussed in the concluding pages of the pamphlet.

It must be understood that the facts presented will relate only to the period covered from May, 1915, to the end of January, 1916, and refer chiefly to the Manchester district.

The discussion of the industrial outlook and its possible development is intended to provoke thought and is a sincere attempt to take stock of the information and ideas available at the moment.

In no sense are any suggested conclusions to be regarded as the final opinion of the Committee.

NEW TRADES

TRAMWAYS

In May the Amalgamated Association of Tramway and Vehicle Workers passed a resolution voting that the employment of women on the tramways was a most dangerous and unwise innovation. The Manchester and Salford Trades and Labour Council in July passed a resolution urging that no women should be employed while it was possible to obtain men, and when, in August, the Salford Corporation engaged women to work on the tramways a number of men employees refused to work with the women. The local branch of the Trade Union agreed to the employment of women, provided they received the same rate of pay as men, having been convinced that the necessity existed. In September, 1915, a quarter of the Salford conductors were women, by October 1st, nearly half. In Manchester, women were employed as guards from the beginning of November and the number is increasing every week. It is likely that the women will be employed as drivers in the near future. In all parts of the county of Lancashire women are found as conductors and in some cases as drivers.

The introduction of women on to the trams was bitterly opposed by the Tramway and Vehicle Workers' Unions, but where women have been introduced they have been almost invariably successful in securing equality of payment, and women are now admitted into the union. In certain towns, Salford and Birmingham for instance, the male rate per hour is paid but the women do not work as many hours as the men. In Manchester and Glasgow the full week's work is done, and the male rates received by the women. In London, though for some time the police refused to license them, the women are now employed on both tram and 'bus, and receive the same weekly wage, but it is interesting to note that the

proposal to work the women half time and pay them half the men's wage was resisted by the union, who said that the half wage would not be sufficient for a woman's needs.

Hull pays the women the male rates, but the war bonus of 2s. is paid to the driver for turning round the trolley! Cleaners for the cars have been engaged in Liverpool at 18s. a week to do work for which men were paid 26s. The Labour Councillors' resolution to equalise the payment was defeated by a large majority. In every instance we can find, women conductors, and the two cases of women drivers, are paid the male rates. The same rule seems to hold good in certain other branches of transport. The Metropolitan Asylums Board, and the National Motor Cab Co. pay their women motor drivers male rates. Private firms in Manchester employing women drivers for commercial cars are in some cases paying £1 instead of the men's 32s., but in other cases, especially where the women are competent to undertake repairs, full rates are paid. At a large Co-operative Laundry in the north, where the women in charge of the laundry vans bed, groom and harness the horses as well as distribute and collect goods, they are paid the same wages as the men.

LEATHER TRADES

There has been a great increase of women's labour in the leather trade to cope with the demand for army equipment.

In the Manchester district the women have not been taken into the men's unions, but an attempt has been made with very slight results to organise them separately. For a 53 hours week, adult women are paid about 15s. Men in the same districts on the same work earn 9½d. to 10½d. an hour. The position of the women employed in the leather trade in the Midlands shows a striking contrast. The Midland Leather Trades Federation, when the influx of women occurred in the spring, promptly admitted them as members of their Unions. They were admitted to the trade by agreement with the employers that they were paid the same rates as the men, that

is, 8½d. to 10d. an hour, with the 10 per cent. war bonus already granted to the men. These wages are being paid to the women engaged in this industry in the Midlands.

RAILWAYS

At a conference of the National Union of Railwaymen in June, Mr. J. H. Thomas, M.P., stated that a considerable number of women were employed on the railways and that in the course of the summer the number would rapidly increase. He also said that the employment of women on the railways would probably be permanent, and it was essential that proper payment should be secured for them. The N. U. of Railwaymen, thereupon decided to admit women members on the lesser scale of contributions. In August an agreement was made by the N.U.R. with the Railway Companies that women replacing men should receive men's minimum time rates in the same grade. This agreement has been adhered to but women have not received either the old 2s. war bonus nor the newer 5s. one. The pay of a ticket collector for a week of 6 turns of 10 hours each is 21s. The substitution of women for men took place extensively among clerks and carriage cleaners and a few women have been engaged as ticket collectors and platform porters.

Clerks and carriage cleaners work the same hours as men though the work has had to be slightly adjusted for the carriage cleaning women, men cleaners doing the inaccessible parts.

Girl clerks are not paid the rates of the youths whom they have replaced. The usual rate for men over 20 is 25s. to 30s. a week. The shorthand clerks, typists and telephone attendants have been taken on at the ratio of 3 girls to 2 men. They are being paid about the following rates: under 16, 8s.; under 22, 12s. to 16s. A few older women are being paid £1 and, in the head offices, 25s. The Railway Clerks' Association has decided that women employed for the duration of the war are eligible for membership and is trying to secure better wages for women clerks employed on the railways.

SHOP ASSISTANTS

In December the organiser of the Shop Assistants' Union reports that in this district 2,000 women were employed in the distributive trades in the place of men who had enlisted. The Amalgamated Union of Co-operative Employees also report a great influx of women into the distributive trades. In most cases the work is not identical with that done by men, partly because the women have not yet acquired the experience necessary and partly because some firms are only training them as saleswomen without giving them any instruction in the technicalities of the trade. At the present time the wages of women in all branches vary from 8s. to 24s., with an average of about 16s., and the hours vary in the wholesale branches from 48 to 70 and in retail from 60 to 80. In the confectionery business the Trades Board Minimum rates are 13s. for girls over 18 for 52 hours, and 6s. for boys and girls under 15.

The National Union of Shop Assistants, which has a large number of women members, is doing its best towards organising the new supply of women, but the great numbers and also the fact that many have taken on the job as "war work," merely in order to release men for the army, are rendering organisation difficult. The union hopes to be able to negotiate a limitation of hours in the grocery trade to 60 per week and also a minimum wage for women employees from 22s. 6d. to 28s. 6d. per week for women over 21. The A.U.C.E. has been fighting the battle of the women workers with much energy within the Co-operative Stores. It has made demands for the payment of women replacing men at the men's scale after one month's probation and for the employment of members of a Trade Union only, for the instruction of the new employees on the temporary nature of the employment and for the provision of proper conditions for the women.

The fight for equal pay for women taking the place of enlisted males in the distributive trades is made more difficult

by the fact that substitution has for so long been allowed to continue, at low rates, unchallenged, and because the proportion of organised workers to the total number employed is so small. The National Union of Clerks has for long claimed equal rates for both sexes, but they have not been able to enforce it outside Trade Union offices. The Treasury Circular with its glaring differences of pay has set the standard for even skilled branches of clerical work in public employment. To the credit of the Manchester Sanitary Committee they have recently issued a new scale for clerks which is the same for both sexes.

The weakness of the clerical trades is shown by a comparison of what the N. U. R. has obtained for women, with the conditions to which the Railway Clerks' Association has had to submit. At their last Annual Conference a resolution in favour of equal pay was carried unanimously. The secretary of the Association states that in some cases the women are doing precisely the same work as men, but frequently the companies have readjusted the work in order to give the less responsible work to women.

The scales actually paid show wide disparity. The N.-E. Railway sets an efficiency test. If the women pass it their maximum is £66, if not, their maximum is £48. The male clerks maximum is £100. The G.C.R. women clerks start at 6s., rising to 20s. The men's maximum is £80 to £100 per year. From particulars given of 12 railway companies the average maximum is 20s. for women, £2 for men. On the L. and S.-W., women supervisors only reach 30s., while the maximum for ordinary male clerks is £2.

The experiences of the two largest unions catering for shop workers form an interesting chapter in the fight for equal pay. The National Union of Shop Assistants decided at the outset that it would not be possible to secure equality and computed a woman assistant to be worth three-fourths of a male worker, and this was ratified by the last Annual Conference. The Amalgamated Union of Co-operative Employes

issued a circular in August, 1915, to all Co-operative Societies on the substitution of male for female labour in shops and offices. This demanded that male rates should be paid immediately on engagement to experienced females, but one month's probation on A.U.C.E. female rates should be allowed in respect of female assistants without experience, but that after this probationary period the wages and conditions of such substituted female labour shall be individually the same as those sanctioned by the union for males.

The Co-operative Union, which acts as the Employers' Federation to the Co-operative Movement, recommended societies only to pay the Congress female scale, the highest rate of which is 17s. at 20 years. A large society in the West of England may be cited as an example of how far Committees of Management fall short of the union's demands. This society proposed holding grocery classes for female assistants. After six weeks' training, candidates between 19 and 20 years who passed the theoretical examination and practical efficiency test gaining 100% of marks were to receive 10s. 6d., if over 75%, 9s. 6d., and other ages in proportion. The highest wage offered to adults who fulfilled the above requirements was 15s. and 13s. 6d. respectively. Thus intelligent girls of 20 having passed a searching efficiency test would be paid 10s. 6d. to do work formerly done by males at union rates of wages.

The A.U.C.E. by guerilla warfare has enforced its conditions in over twenty societies, pressing the question to a strike where necessary. Systematic negotiations are now being undertaken throughout the country on the basis of these initial successes. If the Co-operative Movement as a whole can be induced to act in accordance with the union's demand, an immense step forward in the campaign for equal pay will have been taken, the value of which to the whole Trade Union Movement it would be difficult to overestimate.

MUNITIONS

The information in this section has been obtained from employers, from workpeople and from Trade Union organisers.

NUMBERS. It is difficult to do more than guess at the number of women employed in munitions in the Manchester area. The number increases steadily as new plant is secured and made ready for operation and also as the scheme for the dilution of labour matures. There are as few as 16 women in one shop and as many as 2,000 in another. We estimate that at the end of January, 1916, the number of women employed locally on munitions cannot be short of 10,000.

WAGES. The wages paid to the women show very wide variations from shop to shop, and within the same shop from process to process. The wages of girls between 14 and 16 years of age vary from 5s. to 10s. The wages of adult learners vary from 9s. to 16s. per week. When it is at all possible young girls are employed in preference to adult women and many girls are taken into the works straight from school. Adult women who have passed through the training stage earn from 9s. to £1 per week, time wage. Many shops pay 15s. as a time wage for women, while between 12s. and 15s. is an average. Generally, where the women work overtime, they are paid overtime rates on the same basis as the men. In most shops, a war bonus of 1s. to 1s. 6d. a week is paid. Wages on piece-work vary even more widely than the time rates and it is extremely difficult to present any general account of the wages being earned, taking into account overtime, variation in skill and variation in the number of hours worked in the different shops. The piece rate is normally based on a time rate of from 12s. to 15s. per week and the women on these rates earn from 16s. to £1 for a 53 hours' week.

HOURS. In the Manchester area the normal working week in engineering shops is 53 hours. In most cases this is the minimum time worked by the women. Overtime, in-

cluding night work is, however, quite general and some shops are working 2 shifts, 12½ hours day and 11½ hours night. Certain firms employ their women in 3 shifts of 8 hours each. This is probably much the best method of employment from the point of view of the women's health, but it is not popular, since it means no overtime pay and generally no extra pay for night work.

Women are now employed on a wide variety of processes, from the making of small fuse needles to the turning of 18lb., and in some cases, heavier shells. Their work includes the painting of bombs, the varnishing of shells, the hot and fatiguing work of acetylene welding, the insulating of cables, the winding of cables, and the finishing and testing of grenades. It varies from quite unskilled work to the minding of complicated automatic machinery involving a considerable degree of skill. In aeroplane work women are engaged on most of the processes, they varnish frames, cover the planes, machine the canvas, enamel, dope, and finish wire splicings.

Previous to the war very few firms employed women in the engineering shops in this district and the production of shells and fuses was not an industry in the city of Manchester. The Shells and Fuses Agreement and the Treasury Memorandum of March, 1915 (later incorporated in the Munitions Act of June, 1915, laid down the terms on which the metal trades would agree to the introduction of unskilled and female labour on the production of munitions. As a consequence during the spring and summer of that year women and girls began, at first in small numbers, to be employed by the firms producing munitions. As the summer drew on and new lathes and new machines were set up and works extended, the number of women so employed increased rapidly until by September and October of 1915 several thousands of women and girls had entered the engineering shops. Dressmakers, workers from the various making trades, domestic servants, cotton operatives, girls straight from school and a proportion of married women, including soldiers' wives, all became busy in producing munitions of war.

In June, the Women's War Interests Committee had asked that a minimum time rate of £1 for a week of 48 hours to women of over 18, should be paid to women engaged on munitions. Although some firms in the district do pay this rate, the rate paid generally in the district falls much below it. In October, the Ministry of Munitions issued "Circular L2," recommending, amongst other things, that a minimum of £1 a week should be paid in all controlled establishments to women doing the work of men. These recommendations so far have with few exceptions not been carried out. The division and sub-division of labour and the introduction of new machinery following on the introduction of unskilled and female labour has made it very difficult to say whether a woman is doing a man's work or not. Not one woman in fifty is actually carrying through the whole of the process which a man carried through. In that sense the recommended wage of £1 can only apply to a small proportion of women employed on munitions. These "recommended" wages are now obligatory in controlled establishments under the Amended Munitions Act of January, 1916. It is to be hoped that as all the women employed on munitions in this area are employed on work formerly done by men (although the work is differently organised) that this minimum will be insisted upon by the Ministry of Munitions.

Unless this is done there is a real danger, as this committee has repeatedly pointed out, that the standard of wages for women, established in this district previous to the war, will be seriously lowered by this great mass of badly paid, unorganised female labour in the engineering shops.

POST OFFICE WORK

In the Manchester Postal Area the number of women employed on work normally done by men was at the end of January, 1916, as follows: Clerical, 10; Sorting, 112; Postmen's Work, 101.

The Postmaster reports that the women so engaged perform their duties efficiently and the health of the women has been

generally satisfactory. The indoor women are now beginning to do night duty and the effect of this on their health has, of course, not yet been ascertained.

The pay for a woman substitute to begin with is £1 for a week of 48 hours. On being pronounced efficient (usually at the end of 6 or 8 weeks) they receive an increase of 2s. a week. A war bonus of 1s. 6d. a week is paid also.

For attendances of less than 48 hours proportionate pay is given.

Very large numbers of women were employed during December to cope with the Christmas traffic.

COTTON TRADE

OLD AND NEW BRANCHES. The crisis regarding women's labour in the cotton trade centres round two branches of work in which the shortage of men has made the demand for women to take up new work imperative—the mule-spinning rooms and dyeing, bleaching and finishing. As the crisis is not yet over, our report is necessarily incomplete.

OLD BRANCHES. In the weaving sheds, there has been an increased demand for women in order to replace men who have enlisted or taken up munitions work. In particular there have been urgent appeals from the Rochdale masters for women with experience to return to the mills. But in these old employments the replacements have been effected automatically since women's work was already arranged for, and no new conditions were required.

NEW BRANCHES. In the branches in which hitherto only men have been employed, however, many difficulties have arisen, and are not yet by any means overcome. The shortage of men's labour in the mule-spinning rooms began with the revival of the cotton trade in the early summer. The first attempt to meet the shortage was a demand for the lowering of the school age. This was defeated in October, and in any case the supply so created would have been insufficient

to meet the need. Latterly the same shortage has been felt in the blowing rooms, but only in a few places has it become acute enough to lead to a crisis. In both cases the introduction of women has been strenuously opposed by the men's unions; the discussions are not yet closed, but in many districts the operatives' unions have at length consented to the admission of women under guarantees, to some or all branches of mule-spinning. Ashton-under-Lyne and Stalybridge admit them to all branches; Oldham to all except as minders or joiner minders; several places as piecers and creelers, in Manchester and Bolton they were formerly so employed; while Stockport and Preston still refuse to have them in any capacity.

SUITABILITY AND HEALTH. The opposition is based on the contention of the unsuitability of the work to women and on moral and sentimental objections to men and women working together. We have so far not been able to make any thorough investigation of the conditions appertaining in the districts where women piecers are usually employed, and of how far the class of work in other districts would modify them, but it seems certain that both arrangements and work would need some adjustment if women were to take it up suitably. Opinions differ very much as to whether the necessary adjustments are possible, even among those who are accustomed to support the extension of women's field of labour. The hot, damp atmosphere of the spinning rooms is probably injurious, especially to very young girls and pregnant women, but it is doubtful whether it is more harmful to the ordinary adult woman than to young boys. Suitable dressing-rooms for both men and women should be insisted on and a revision of working clothing for both would be necessary. Women's ordinary clothing would be too hot, and would be extremely dangerous amongst the spinning machinery, both for spinners and piecers, but it does not seem impossible that something suitable should be devised. The fact that a sufficient supply of women for the Oldham spinning-rooms is not available, nearly a month after

the signing of the agreement, points to the fact that the women themselves disapprove of the work. An Oldham man declared that none of the spinners would allow their own daughters to take up the work. A Stalybridge official considers the work unsuitable to women from its arduousness and the atmosphere in which it is carried on, but thinks the moral objections quite unfounded, and that the sanitary and sentimental ones must be waived for the period of the war.

WAGES. Old Branches of Women's Work: Weavers, 18s. to 27s.; Ring Spinners, 18s. to 23s.; Cardroom Hands, 20s. to 26s.; Under-reelers, Doublers, and Gassers, 16s. to 22s.

New Branches (the following are taken from the Oldham Agreement): Big and Little Piecers, same pay as men replaced; Creelers and Spinners on one pair of Mules, wages to be agreed upon between the Minder and the firm, but not to exceed those of Big Piecers; Learners (for two weeks) to be paid 7s., 5s. by firm and 2s. by Spinner.

Dyer): Several large firms have made war grants as follows: Time: Men, 3s.; Women, 2s.; with a bonus to all who work the number of hours asked by the firm and 2½d. an hour extra for overtime.

Agreements are now being arranged between employers and Trade Unions as to the entrance of women into dyeing, bleaching and finishing. The terms have not yet been published. It is probable that as in the spinning room the women will be paid at the same rate as the men they replace.

WOMEN'S LABOUR CONDITIONS

(CANTEENS AND NIGHTWORK)

The spirit and endurance of women munition workers has everywhere received unstinted praise. In many establishments women have worked continuous overtime for many weeks on end. When the Health of Munition Workers' Committee sat in Manchester it was stated in evidence supplied by our representatives that women were working 80 hours a week in several establishments. Girls and women so employed complained of the bad effect of continuous overtime. In one particular establishment where overtime had extended over some weeks, no woman was able to work a full week, many of them being absent 2 days out of 7.

Engineering work for women is heavy and exhausting and it is doubtful whether nightwork does not put too heavy a strain on the nervous system of the average woman worker.

Ample canteen provision is necessary to provide warm and substantial meals for women, especially for those employed on nightwork. Memorandum No. 3 of the Health of Munition Workers' Committee urges upon employers the setting up of industrial canteens in all controlled establishments. In many establishments the provisions for heating and serving food are totally inadequate, and the health of the women workers is suffering thereby. In many factories women are employed on shells of over 20lbs. weight. The Committee has no evidence of any injury done to the health of the women workers by the handling of heavy weights.

The Women's War Interests Committee in June, 1915, agreed "that a three-shift system of 8 hours is preferable to continuous overtime for women; that no women should be employed on nightwork for more than 2 weeks out of 6; that ample canteen provision should be provided and where night work is in operation this should be obligatory."

ATTITUDE OF MEN'S UNIONS

The demand for "equal pay for equal work," or to avoid the cliché, that women's work should be paid on results, and not on a fancied comparison of their needs with men's, has long been advocated by feminists, but up to the outbreak of war success had only been attained in a few branches of professional work, and in industry, only by the Lancashire cotton weavers. Male trade unionists did not look kindly on the proposal, and where men and women were organised in the same union, lower rates were almost invariably fixed for the women workers. The withdrawal of the greater part of male labour from productive industry opened the door to an influx of women's labour into hitherto barred trades.

The first attitude of the majority of unions threatened with this innovation was that of uncompromising refusal to work with the women. When this proved untenable, the more far-sighted Trade Union leaders saw the danger of allowing a double standard of payment for the same work. It is now possible to attempt some estimate of how far the Trade Union world has been driven to overcome its prejudice against a woman receiving the same pay as a man, in order to safeguard its own hardly-won standard rates.

In those trades whose officials realised the need in time to negotiate for a regularised admission of women, a better position has been set up both for the women now and for the men in the future than in those trades into which women's labour has been thrown without suitable preparation. The Railway and Tramway Workers, and such of the Spinners' Associations as have already made agreements have secured wages for the women which will prevent serious undercutting of men. The Federation of Woodwork Trades has made preparation for local agreements on similar lines where women are employed in making munition boxes.

Owing to the constitution of the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, women cannot be admitted as members. The A.S.E. made no agreement with employers when women were admitted as to wages or organisation, and a very serious situation has resulted. In this district not less than 10,000 women are employed in the engineering shops on munitions, and not more than 10 per cent. of these are organised. There is a danger that the standard of wages and conditions of labour for men in the engineering trade may be very seriously affected unless the A.S.E. is able to re-establish their control of the position.

From October, 1914, to February, 1915, women were increasingly employed in the manufacture of shells and fuses without the A.S.E. or the Allied Trades making any move to fix their wages. They kept the women out where they could, and where this was not possible, low female rates were paid without much protest from the men. Investigations undertaken by the Manchester and District Women's War Interests Committee, and later by the British Association, showed that women's wages on shell-making ranged from 10s. to 15s.; and that on processes which had undoubtedly been reserved to skilled men, such as oxy-acetylene welding, women received 18s. to £1 as compared with the skilled rate of 42s.

The first move in the direction of equal pay was made by the Shells and Fuses Agreement of March 5th, 1915, when the Engineering Employers' Federation agreed with the A.S.E. and the Steam Engine Makers' and United Machine Workers' Unions, that "where semi-skilled or female labour is employed in place of skilled labour the rates paid shall be the usual rate of the district for the operations performed." This was reinforced by the Treasury agreement of March 17th, where it was stated that the admission of semi-skilled or female labour—"shall not affect adversely the rates customarily paid for the job." This clause was repeated in Schedule 2 of the Munitions Act in July.

It needs but little experience of the industrial world to see how easily so loosely worded an agreement could be evaded;

and there was little pretence of obeying it where women workers were concerned. The A.S.E., not admitting women to membership, did not take a very firm stand on the matter, though frequent deputations from the A.S.E. and Allied Trades and non-trade union organisations such as the Women's War Interests Committee emphasised that the clause was not being observed.

'As a result of such pressure, the Circular L2 was issued in October, 1915, containing 15 recommendations relating to the employment of women on munition work of a class, which prior to the war was not recognised as women's work, in districts where such work was customarily carried on. This circular recommended a minimum time wage of £1 a week on work customarily done by men; except where they were employed on work usually done by fully-skilled tradesmen, in which case they were to have the same time, overtime, Sunday and holiday allowances as such men. Elaborately phrased clauses were included to ensure that on piece work and premium bonus systems women's rates should be based on those of the men they replaced. The whole value of the circular was destroyed, however, by clause 9, which recommended that piece work prices and premium bonus basis times should be fixed by mutual agreement between the employer and the women concerned. Thus the only authority that could ensure these recommendations being put into operation—the Trade Unions—were swept out of court.

The circular had no sanction. Employers interviewed after it had been issued frankly stated that they had not the slightest intention of obeying it. There is no recorded instance of any employer being brought before a Munitions Tribunal for not observing it. In the Amending Bill to the Munitions Act, the Ministry takes power to fix women's wages, through specially operated tribunals, and this may lead to some observance of L2 being forced upon employers. If the men's unions stand firm there is some hope that considerable progress may be made in enforcing male rates for women doing men's work

in the munition industry. Unfortunately the difficulties between the various unions open to the women make it impossible for them to be sufficiently well organised to take any firm action in the matter themselves.

Clerks, warehousemen and shop-assistants are all badly organised, with the exception of the employees of the Co-operative Stores. These trades are being inundated and the officials of the Trade Unions concerned are doing their best to get the women inside their organisations.

The hostility to women's labour, as such, has almost disappeared among trade unionists. Most of the objections made by the officials of Trade Unions to the introduction of women are based on the danger of a lower standard, owing to the under-payment of women. Some of those objections, founded on the unsuitability of the work to women, as in the case of the spinners may be justified.

A growing interest in the conditions of women's work among trade unionists has been made manifest by the improved attendance of delegates from Trade Unions at the later conferences called by the Women's War Interests Committee, compared with the earlier ones.

Any hope of enforcing proper conditions and wages and of averting a labour crisis at the end of the war lies, not with the women themselves, but with the men's unions. It is impossible to organise the women quickly enough to take any adequate steps through their own new unions, but strong organisations of men exist and have it in their power to demand such arrangements as shall safeguard, not only the present position, but the future one.

TRAINING SCHEMES

ENGINEERING. In most cases the engineering shops prefer to give any training necessary in their own works. In June, 1915, the Manchester School of Technology set going a scheme for the training of munition workers. The course extended over five lessons of two hours each. Fee, 5s. Pupils were familiarised with the handling of tools and dealing with machinery. These classes were soon discontinued for the reasons given above.

COMMERCIAL. In October, 1915, the Manchester Education Committee formulated a scheme for training women to take positions at commercial houses. A six weeks' course of instruction, fee, 10s. 6d., comprising commercial arithmetic, correspondence, business practice and book-keeping and in some cases, typewriting and business French. Over 300 women completed their training before Christmas, 1915, and most of these have been placed in posts in municipal offices, banks, home trade and shipping houses and in insurance offices. This scheme is still in operation.

AGRICULTURE AND GARDENING. The Lancashire and Cheshire County Committee have trained a considerable number of women as gardeners since their scheme was instituted in September, 1915. Training has been given in floriculture, vegetable and fruit growing in public parks in Manchester, Preston, Rochdale and Eccles. No maintenance is given during the ten weeks' training period. So far, there has been no difficulty in placing the women so trained. A considerable number have been trained in private gardens and in these cases board and lodging have been provided during the training period. In January, 1916, the same Committee is canvassing the villages of Lancashire and Cheshire for women willing to be trained for work on farms. Training is given at Knowsley, Hulton and Wilston. It is estimated

that at least 500 women have taken up employment in gardening and agriculture in Lancashire and Cheshire since the outbreak of the war. Similar schemes are being carried on at Reading, Newport (Shropshire) and in Staffordshire.

Under the local Relief Committee since October, 1914, women have been trained as power machinists to supply the extended demand for machinists to carry out the army contracts placed in the city. The women receive a maintenance grant of 8s. weekly during the training period of three months, and also receive the value of the work done.

THE WORK OF THE MANCHESTER AND DISTRICT WOMEN'S WAR INTERESTS COMMITTEE

The Manchester and District Women's War Interests Committee was formed in May, 1915, chiefly with a view to investigating and making public the conditions of women employed in munition factories, but as new occupations were opened to women as a direct result of the war, the scope of the Committee was extended. The work of the Committee has chiefly fallen into three branches: investigation, the holding of conferences and consultations and the making of direct representations to Government departments and local committees.

INVESTIGATION. A research sub-committee undertook a thorough investigation into the conditions of women's war work in the Manchester district. Enquiry forms were sent to secretaries of Trades Unions and other labour organisations, while information was secured from employers by correspondence and personal interviews. In this way reports were obtained from a large number of engineering firms engaged in munition works and a careful collection of press cuttings was started at the outset and has been continued ever since.

CONFERENCES

The first conference was held on June 12th and the following programme was agreed on:

Proposals which are put before the Conference by Women's War Interests Committee, as a suggested basis for a publicity campaign.

WAGES. That a guaranteed minimum of £1 per week

of 48 hours should be paid to every adult woman worker (over 18 years) employed on munitions. On piece work the rates should be such as to give a guaranteed minimum of £1 per week.

All women employed on night work or overtime should be paid at the rate of time and a quarter.

HOURS. That a three-shift system of 8 hours is preferable to continuous overtime for women. No woman should be employed on night work for more than 2 weeks out of 6.

CONDITIONS. That ample canteen provision should be provided, and where night work is in operation this should be obligatory.

At the second Conference, held on October 23, representatives of various branches of the A.S.E. and representatives of the Cotton Operatives' Association were present and considered the transference of women from textile to munition factories.

The third Conference, on December 18th, was summoned to make known more widely the existing conditions of women's labour on munition work and to arrange joint action in securing:

"A minimum wage of £1 per week of 48 hours for all women engaged in the manufacture of war material and the extension of the definition of 'munition workers' to cover all persons employed in the production of war material."

The policy of the Women's War Interests Committee was again unanimously endorsed and full support was promised by the representatives of the 12 Trades and Labour Councils, 30 Trade Unions, 5 branches of the I.L.P., 9 branches of the Women's Labour League, 11 branches Women's Co-operative

Guilds, the Manchester and Salford Labour Party, the Rochdale Labour Party, 4 Suffrage Societies, and a number of other women's organisations.

In August, a national conference of the united metal trades was held in York, when the proposals of the Manchester Women's War Interests Committee were adopted as representing the minimum conditions under which the men trade unionists ought to sanction the entrance of women's labour into the production of munitions. This was an event of great importance. It was one of the first occasions on which a representative group of men trade unionists had shown signs of recognising the serious menace to their own position in allowing women in considerable numbers to undertake work usually done by themselves, and at wages far below their own standard.

DEPUTATIONS

As a result a joint deputation from the metal trades, the National Federation of Women Workers and the Manchester Women's War Interests Committee met Dr. Addison and Mr. Beveridge as representing the Ministry of Munitions and placed before them the proposals adopted at the York conference. Dr. Addison agreed that women should not be under-paid and that the danger of depressing men's wages should be carefully guarded against.

On December 23rd, Dr. Addison met a further deputation at which he agreed that it was important to have women properly represented on committees which controlled the working conditions and also that he was prepared to consider the appointment of women to such committees, "more especially to wages tribunals on the ground of their personal knowledge of women's wages and conditions of labour."

The persistent presentation of the Committee's proposals has certainly influenced the Government's recommendations to employers in controlled establishments, and the constant

presentation of facts showing that the recommendations as to wages are being ignored has assisted in inducing the Government to take power in the amended Munitions Bill to regulate wages and conditions of labour for women in controlled establishments, and the clear case which has been made out for more direct representation of the women workers in the Manchester area has led the Ministry of Munitions to consider this demand favourably, and we expect it will be granted.

OUTLOOK

There is little doubt that after the war, much of the work previously done by men and now being done by women will continue to be done by women, particularly where no guarantees exist between men's Trades Unions and the employers. This fact is recognised in a speech delivered by Mr. G. W. Muir, spokesman of a deputation to Mr. Lloyd George during his visit to Glasgow at Christmas, from which we give the following extract: "Under the latest regulations, women in controlled establishments, doing work hitherto done by skilled men, are to receive a wage of £1 per week. Compared with the wage received by some of these women in other employment, that may mean an advance of from 9s. to 12s. per week. But, compare it with the wage of the skilled man whose place she has taken and you will find a difference of from 18s. to £1 per week. That means an actual gain to the employers and a loss, not only to the skilled man, but to the entire working class. It means a lowering of the whole working class standard. We are convinced the employing class are not likely to give up such a position."

Much sub-division of processes, enabling semi-skilled or unskilled workers to replace skilled men, is now an accomplished fact. Where this sub-division has resulted in increased productivity, the machinery will be retained after the conclusion of peace and the employment of women will be permanent. Even on the new machinery, the wages paid to women bear no relation to their output or their efficiency, nor are they being paid the equivalent of a man's wage. There is an obvious danger that women entering trades, without proper guarantees, will permanently depress the rates of wages in those trades.

In some trades this danger has been avoided by the action of the Trade Unions concerned. For example, women are now being employed as minders and joiner minders in the spinning room, under an agreement signed between the Ashton and District Cotton Employers' Association and the Ashton Operative Cotton Spinners' Association. At the end of the training period the women are to be paid exactly the same wage as the man whom she replaces. Similar agreements have been entered into in many parts of Lancashire. In January, 1916, conferences are being held of employers and Trades Unions in the dyeing, bleaching and finishing trades to fix, by mutual agreement, the terms on which women may enter these occupations. Similar agreements have been made in the wood trades, railways and tramways. By such action, women do not accept work under terms which reduces the value of the man's labour. Such agreements are only possible in those trades where the Trade Unions accept the women as members. The men's unions are recognising more fully the necessity of controlling the conditions under which women are allowed to enter new trades.

In the long run, the status of the woman worker will depend upon the degree of her organisation. Of the women engaged in munitions in January, 1916, in this district, not more than 10 or 12 per cent. are organised. Under their present constitution the A.S.E. cannot accept women as members and it is obviously difficult for other organisations to reach these women. A better condition of affairs obtains amongst the tramway and railway workers, where the National Union of Raiwaymen and the Tramway and Vehicle Workers' Union have opened their ranks to the women. This seems to be the safest method. It avoids the possibility of women's labour being cheap labour and abolishes the sex distinction in rates of pay and makes it possible that in the future the work will be done by those most suited for it.

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